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C H U R C H N E W S

F R O M T H E N O R T H E R N C O U N T R I E S

Edited by the Northern Ecumenical Institute

Sigtuna, Sweden

Director: Dr. Harry Johansson, Sigtuna, Sweden

Editor: Rev. Johs. Langhoff, Øster Egesborg per Mern, Denmark

No. 5 May 2nd, 1955.

Northern Christian Journalists' Conference.

The Northern Ecumenical Institute at Sigtuna, the common organ for the ecumenical movements in the Northern countries, has planned a Northern Christian journalists' conference to be held at the school for church studies at Järvenpää, north of Helsinki (Helsingfors), Finland, from May 20 - 22. The conference will be attended by editors and other pressmen from the daily newspapers as well as from Church and Free Church papers. Among the subjects on the programme are "A Pressman's Views on the Church", "A Churchman's Views on the Press", and "Can Christian Principles be Applied to Politics?".

The conference is to be held immediately after the celebrations in Turku (Åbo) on Ascension Day commemorating the 800th anniversary of the Finnish Church, and those attending the conference are invited to take part in these celebrations.

Northern Conference on the Position of Women in the Church.

Under the motto "Questions put by the Women's Movement to the Church" a Northern conference with representatives from the churches as well as from the Women's Movement has recently been held at Sankta Katharinastiftelsen at Sparreholm (Sweden).

Among the lecturers were the professors D. Wendland, Kiel, and Rafael Gyllenberg, Turku (Åbo), who both spoke on the views of theology regarding man and woman, while the leader of the World Council of Churches' work on these questions, Mlle. Madeleine Barot, and the Norwegian Bishop Arne Fjellbu shed international light on the problems regarding the relation of the Church to women.

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PAGE 12 Gjetuna, Sweden R E G O U N T R I E S

Director: Dr. Harry Johnsson, Gjetuna, Sweden

Editor: Rev. Joha. Langhoff, Pastor Pressbyr.per Norn, Denmark

No. 5 May 2nd, 1955

Northern Christian Journalists' Conference.

The Northern Ecumenical Institute, Gjetuna, the common organ for the ecumenical movements in the Northern countries, has planned a Northern Christian journalists' conference to be held at the school for church studies, Trondheim, north of Helsinki (Helsingfors). Finland, from May 2nd to 5th. The conference will be attended by editors and other pressmen from the daily newspapers as well as from Church and Free Church papers. Among the subjects on the programme are "A Pressman on the Church", "A Christian Pressman's Views on the Church", "Should Christian Publications Be Applied to Politics?", "Press and Church Relations in Sweden", "Christian Press Work in Finland", "Christian Press Work in Norway", "Christian Press Work in Denmark", "Christian Press Work in Iceland".

The conference is to be opened officially after the celebrations in Turku (Abo) on Sunday, May 1st, commemorating the 800th anniversary of the Finnish Church. Christian leaders and pressmen from the Northern countries are invited to take part in these celebrations.

Northern Conference on the Church.

Under the motto "Questions put by the Church", a Movement to study "the Church" as a Northern conference will be prepared at a meeting in Gjetuna, Sweden, from May 2nd to 5th. Representatives from the churches as well as from the women's Movement has recently been invited to this meeting.

Northern Seminar on Training of Pastors in Finland (Sweden).

Among the lecturers announced for this seminar, which is to be held at Nastola, Tornio, Trondheim, Mossland, Kiel, and Narvik, Oyllenberg, Professor of theology regarding many denominational problems, Mr. Bjorn Bro, Church Council of Churches' worship, Pastor Arne Fjellbu, Head of the Norwegian Pastors' Association

The conference, at which the leader of Sankta Katharina-stiftelsen Dr. Margit Sahlin was hostess, appointed a committee composed of two representatives from each of the Northern countries to follow up the problems discussed and prepare for a new conference.

Co-operation Between Christian Publishers in the Northern Countries.

For several years the leaders of a number of Christian publishing companies connected with popular revival movements have been meeting at intervals to discuss common problems.

Recently a conference of this kind was held at Helsinki (Helsingfors), and besides the practical discussions several lectures were held on the following subjects: "Negative and Positive Aspects of Last Year's Book Production", "Viewpoints Regarding the Aims of Christian Publishers", and "Literary Standards Applicable to Christian Literature".

DENMARK

Danish Mission Station in Arabia Forced to Evacuate.

The joint council of missionaries under the Danish Missionary Society in Arabia has decided to close the Danish mission station at Mudia in the British protectorate until further notice. At the same time the staff of two women missionaries has been ordered to leave, as disturbances in the protectorate have increased to such an extent that it is felt to be an unjustifiable risk to let the two women continue work there.

The disturbances which have been going on for some time seem to be increasingly aimed at Europeans. Two Englishmen were recently murdered and many cars in the district have been attacked. In a report to the Missionary Society it is stated that officials and European circles in Arabia have long been concerned at the two women missionaries remaining at their post, and as the situation has demanded the placing of a military guard at the mission station and as it is impossible to carry on work because it is dangerous to leave the house even in day-time, it has been decided to close the mission station for the present.

Death of Great Actress, who Became a Preacher.

Anna Bjørner (née Larsen) known throughout Scandinavia as a great actress, who left her brilliant theatre career to become a revivalist preacher, has died in Copenhagen at the age of 79.

From 1892 to 1909 she was the most acclaimed actress in Copenhagen. Though she was known as the "enfant terrible" of the theatre world everyone agreed that she was a genuinely great actress. She suddenly severed her connection with the theatre after having been converted by the Norwegian Methodist, later on Pentecostal minister Th.B. Barrath, and this break was irrevocable. Though she could picture other Christians working in the theatre she herself found it impossible. "For me the way to Jesus left no room for the theatre", she said.

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Through speeches and song she began to witness for the Saviour she had found, and in 1912 she married Lieutenant Sigurd Bjørner. They both left the Lutheran National Church and in a gypsy wagon they toured the country holding revival meetings in a tent. Ten years later the couple opened a meeting hall in Copenhagen and gathered a Pentecostal congregation. She was also highly valued in other Christian circles as a Christian evangelist.

International Kierkegaard-Conference in Denmark.

The Danish Søren Kierkegaard Society has planned an international Kierkegaard conference in Copenhagen for August 10 - 17 to commemorate his death 100 years ago. It is expected that about 50 scholars from many countries will attend. The main subject will be Kierkegaard's thought and its significance in past and present.

Young Homes Movement Passes a Milestone.

The Young Homes Movement in Denmark has recently passed a milestone when it held its 25th convention for young couples at Nyborg Strand. The movement which started soon after the War is one of the most flourishing in the Danish National Church. It was felt that though the Church's youth organizations were able to attract a considerable number of unmarried young people they did not feel quite at home there, when they were married. For this reason it was decided to hold special meetings for "young homes" where their problems as well as various cultural problems might be informally discussed in the light of the Christian faith. These young people were also invited to national conventions. The idea was a success, and now there are no less than 600 circles in Denmark inspired by the new movement. Because of the large numbers who joined the movement it was found necessary to hold several national conventions a year - thus in the spring of 1955 five conventions have been held with more than 1.500 participants bringing the total up to 25 conventions. The movement also has its own paper "Unge Hjem".

The idea has now been taken up in several parts of Norway and seems to be equally successful there.

FINLAND

New Kind of Church Relief Work.

The union "Christian Culture" (Kristillisen Kultuurin Liitto), whose purpose it is in harmony with the National Church and its organs to promote the Christian principles in Finnish culture and to inspire people with a feeling of mutual responsibility in accordance with the command to love one's neighbour as one's self, has been carrying on a new form of church relief work since 1951. A special organization "Friends' Aid" (Ystävien Tuki) was formed to act as a connecting link between a bereft family and the friends who wish to extend practical assistance to them. In the four years "Friends' Aid" has been in existence a sum of 23,5 million Finnish marks has been distributed. Last

year aid was given to 900 families and amounted to 7,5 million marks. Often the individual sums received are relatively small, but as the contributions come from many quarters the total amount can be considerable.

Workers Ask Questions - The Church Answers.

Finland's National Lutheran Church is constantly seeking a closer contact with circles that have little connection with the Church, e.g. in the working class. It is hardly possible to introduce worker priests as has been done in some Catholic countries, nor is it necessary in a National Church such as the Finnish, but various other solutions on the same general principles have been attempted. Thus it is not unusual for bishops to visit large factories on their visitations in the parishes and to speak to the workers and other employees.

Special evangelization days for workers were recently held at Jyväskylä under the motto "We Ask - The Church Answers". The meetings were arranged by the town's congregation, "The People's Bible Society" (Kansan Raamattuseura) and by the local Christian organizations, and were held alternately in buildings belonging to the workers and in the parish halls. Many questions were asked, such as "Is there a God?", "Does the Church not feel that it has acted in opposition to the tenets of Christianity by blessing the war?", "How is the money taken from the people in church taxes used? etc.

The leaders of the meetings were satisfied with the discussions and stated that in their opinion the meetings had done a lot of good.

Cultural Problems in the Limelight.

Cultural problems seen from a Christian viewpoint are at present one of the most discussed subjects in Finnish church life. Recently a Helsinki (Helsingfors) congregation assembled for a number of meetings dealing with the problem of the intelligentsia's relation to the Church, and there was a large attendance to these meetings.

At about the same time The Union for Swedish Parish Work in Finland arranged a similar series of meetings at the Swedish commercial school where Bishop G.O. Rosenqvist was among the speakers, and even though the lectures were given in the big assembly hall, many had to listen to them over a loud-speaker system installed in the lobby outside.

Finally a number of cultural meetings have been held in the University hall and in the Finnish commercial school with the common theme "The Problems of Man", and here Bishop Eino Sormunen, Professor Yrjö Alanen, and Dr. Erkki Kurki-Suonio were among the speakers.

Finland Becomes A Catholic Diocese.

As a new development of the organization of the Catholic Church in the Northern countries Pope Pius XII has now elevated the former apostolic vicariate in Finland to an independent diocese with its seat at Helsinki (Helsingfors), and the former apostolic

vicar Mgr. Guglielmo Cobben has at the same time been appointed bishop of Helsinki (Helsingfors). - There are 2.100 Catholics in Finland.

This means that independent dioceses have been established in all the Northern countries except Iceland.

ICELAND

Great Leader Has Passed Away.

One of the oldest pastors in Iceland, the 80 year old Síra Jónmundur Halldórsson of Stad in Grunnavik has died. With his passing the Icelandic church has lost one of its great leaders. He was the pastor of a parish with miles of trackless wilderness stretching along 42 km of a wild and rocky coast. As more and more of his parishioners moved to a nearby town and left their farms untenanted, the population decreased so that to-day there are no more than 60 or 70 people. He continued his labours till he was 80, travelling on horseback, on foot, by jeep and motor-boat, and at the same time he managed a large farm. A month after handing in his resignation he died.

NORWAY

Larger Church Attendance and Growing Religious Interest.

The Norwegian bishops have now made their annual reports to the Ministry of Church Affairs. They all seem to agree that the violent religious controversies of the last year have not weakened the position of the Church. On the contrary most of these annual reports speak of a larger church attendance and a growing religious interest among the people. The outward position of the Church is also as strong as ever. The number of withdrawals per thousand can scarcely be measured. The church buildings are still the village centres, the clergymen are welcome guests everywhere, and outside Oslo it is quite exceptional to find children who have not been baptized and confirmed. In Oslo between 5 and 10 o/o of the young people have of late been "confirmed" by a secular ceremony.

But the bishops' annual reports also give a clear impression of the weaknesses of the Church. In this connection several of them mention the work among the young people. The children come to Sunday School, but when they get a little older the Church loses contact with them. Another serious problem is how to get the large number of religiously minded people to take active part in the Church's work and to lead them to a personal Christian conviction. Several of the bishops feel that the fault is the Church's own and derives from its tendency to label people. "There are many who would like to get in touch with the Church, but who do not feel at home in the usual Christian meetings nor do they agree with Christian cultural views, and therefore

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"There are many who would like to get in touch with the Church, but who do not feel at home in the usual Christian meetings nor do they agree with Christian cultural views, and therefore

they are not accepted in Church circles," says Bishop Karl Marthinussen, but he is happy to note that in a few places more daring and comprehensive forms of work have been attempted in an effort to reach "the congregation of the suspected".

The Church seems to be strongest in West and South Norway. Bishop Ragnvald Indrebø of Bjørgvin (West Norway) mentions the stronger interest in popular education and home life. In these parts of Norway the Church has endeavoured to increase this interest and to offer guidance by means of a number of courses for clergymen, teachers, and parents.

Both Bishop Indrebø and Bishop Arne Fjellbu of Nidaros stress the need for a deeper realization of the Church's duties in the field of welfare work. Although Bishop Fjellbu feels that Church work is progressing satisfactorily, and that an increasing number of people are taking part in church services, he nevertheless feels that "the Church controversy of the last few years has had a restrictive influence on the comprehensiveness of the Church. There is cause here for churchmen to examine their consciences. There is need for new inspiration in their preaching, for a more concentrated effort in spiritual guidance and a deeper understanding of the Church's welfare work."

Bishop Kristian Schjelderup of Hamar who stood at the heart of last year's controversy about the confession writes in his annual report that "the controversy in the Church .... has not caused such great divergencies in Hamar diocese as might have been feared. On the whole there is great willingness to listen to the Church's message in wide circles and a wish to concentrate on the positive values."

More Army Chaplains Needed.

The need for chaplains in the armed forces has increased considerably, says the leader of the Norwegian corps of army chaplains, Colonel Erling Ulltveit, in his annual report. At present there are 13 full-time army chaplains in the armed forces, but he wants 5 or preferably 6 more.

Before the War when military service did not last more than 3 months there were no permanently employed army chaplains. After the War posts as chaplains has also been enlarged. Beside the permanently appointed chaplains other clergymen also serve as chaplains, especially during the large military manoeuvres.

The interest in the spiritual side of man has been steadily growing in the armed forces, says Colonel Ulltveit. The demands on moral strength, backbone and character are naturally increased with the larger duties and heavier responsibilities laid on the men in the armed forces.

In the course of the last year the army chaplains and the theological students, who act as assistants to the chaplains while doing their military service, held 587 services, 645 meetings and Bible study classes, 1533 devotions, 460 fellowship hours, and 680 "chaplains' hours". These last are obligatory for all men in the armed forces. The chaplains also made 1520 visits to the sick and 558 visits to men in detention.

Special New Testaments for the Soldiers.

The Norwegian Bible Society has published special New Testaments for the Army and Navy. They are the result of several years of co-operation between the army chaplains and the Bible Society. In addition to the New Testament the volumes contain a small selection of David's psalms, a collection of Bible verses which may be specially helpful, several hymns and prayers, the creed and the benediction. Until now some 8.000 copies of these army Testaments have been printed, so there are not enough as yet for a mass distribution. The existing copies will be distributed in connection with spiritual guidance.

Clergymen, Architects, and Artists Discuss Churches.

About 30 clergymen, architects, and artists were recently assembled outside Oslo to discuss guiding principles in church architecture. The erection of a number of new churches in Oslo has been planned, but it became evident at the conference that there is a good deal of doubt and confusion as to architectural design. Among the problems discussed was the special character of the Lutheran church interior. The architects were especially sceptical about the wishes put forward by the clergy for "combined churches" - these should consist of a relatively small room, the church proper, which may on special occasions be combined with an assembly room. In latter years a number of these "combined churches" have been built in Norway, but none of them are architecturally satisfactory. The clergymen present at the discussion nevertheless felt that this design offers so many practical advantages that the attempt to reach a better solution should not be abandonned.

Hundreds of Easter Services on the Mountains.

Easter time is the great season for skiing in Norway. Thousands of Norwegians leave for the mountains - and are away from their home churches for some time. But this is no reason why they should do without an Easter service. In hundreds of tourist centres in the mountains special Easter services are conducted in hotels and lodges which serve as temporary churches. This year, too, such Easter services have been held all over Norway for the benefit of a very large number of Easter tourists.

SWEDEN

Ecumenical Responsibility of the Swedish National Church.

The well-known theological professor Gustaf Wingren of Lund has written a noteworthy article on the ecumenical responsibility of the Swedish National Church in the weekly journal "Vår Kyrka". He points out that while many Lutherans consider the Lutheran confession a necessary basis for intercommunion, thus refusing intercommunion with Anglicans, the Anglicans on the other hand consider the historical episcopate (successio apostolica) to be the necessary presupposition, hence refusing intercommunion with most of the Lutheran churches. The Lutheran National Church of Sweden is in an exceptional position because it has both the Lutheran confession and the historical episcopate, so that inter-

communion is allowed by both sides, and this gives this Church its special ecumenical responsibility.

In this connection Professor Wingren mentions the letter of April 21st 1922 from the Swedish bishops to the Anglican Church concerning intercommunion, where it is expressly stated that neither the Augsburg Confession nor the historical episcopate are considered essential to intercommunion, seeing that symbolic books are merely witnesses to the prophetic and apostolic message, and that the episcopal office is likewise subordinate to the preaching of the Gospel.

This purely evangelical point of view whereby the Church is founded on the Word and the Word alone, must, says Professor Wingren, be maintained in face of the Lutherans who criticize the intercommunion of the Swedish Church with the Anglicans, and in face of Anglican criticism of the Swedish Church's intercommunion with many Lutheran churches of which many have no bishops. The assertion of this point of view gives both liberty and stability, and it is the ecumenical responsibility of the Swedish Church that it should maintain its "yes" to both sides and only say "no" to the negative views of both parties.

Professor Wingren ends by pointing out that the Swedish Church with its views on intercommunion not only occupies an intermediary position between the two groups, but that it has positive views and a positive force compelling it to open its doors wide. Hence he feels that intercommunion should be extended to comprehend other churches which are neither Lutheran nor Anglican.

Is Sweden A Christian Country?

Archbishop Yngve Brilioth has held a lecture at the diocesan meeting at Sandviken with the title "Does the Church have a future?" in which he made several trenchant remarks on the present position of the Swedish National Church. He drew attention to a number of disturbing symptoms in the recent development and then went on to say: -It is uncertain whether Sweden to-day can be called a Christian country.- The outward Christian appearances preserved by society sometimes seem to be far from reality. In social life and in politics spiritual problems are very often treated as if they were oddly irrelevant. The huge parishes in the suburbs of the cities promise to become new heathen land within the Swedish borders. Demands for a reasonable division into parishes have met with strong opposition. Instead of an increase in the number of clergymen corresponding to the increase in population, an appreciable reduction in the number of pastorates is proposed, thus making effective spiritual guidance still harder to perform.

The Archbishop also expressed his fear that the modern State with all its resources and its bureaucracy would smother the freedom without which a church cannot live and perform its tasks. But at the same time he indicated a few bright points, among others being the fact that active opposition to Christianity to-day was not so strong as it was some decades ago. Although the Archbishop was convinced that the complete separation of Church and State would not by any means imply the death of the Church, he nevertheless expressed the hope that it might be possible to avoid the painful loss of strength that must be caused by such a breach.

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Decisions in the Swedish Parliament.

With a clear majority the Swedish Parliament has rejected a Bill introduced by a group of Social Democrats. The Bill proposed that investigations be made to ascertain the practicability of having the local civil authorities take over the financial affairs of the Swedish National Church, which are now managed by local Church councils.

The Parliament likewise has rejected a Bill proposing that gifts to humanitarian, literary, religious, scientific or educational causes should be exempt from tax.

The Parliament has requested the Government to present a Bill at first to the Church Assembly to be held in the autumn of 1956 and thereafter to the Parliament, suggesting the competence for women to be ordained as pastors of the Church of Sweden.